

OCZ-3279

NSC 4/8/53

MEMORANDUM
8 April 1953

When Stalin died, it was our best guess that his successor, Malenkov, or the triumvirate of Malenkov, Beria and Molotov would initially play a waiting and cautious game - sensitive to any move by the free world to probe the possible weaknesses of the new regime.

We felt it probable that until the power was firmly in the hands of one strong man the future line of Soviet policy would not clearly manifest itself. We also assumed that the new regime would start off with the foreign and domestic policies established by Stalin - including the outward expression of unremitting hostility to the West.

Recent Soviet moves belie many of these predictions.

The new regime has moved quickly and erratically on two fronts - on the international front with a peace offensive and on the internal front with an amnesty, a repudiation of the doctors' plot concocted by the Stalin regime, a re-reorganization of party and government machinery, and a scrapping of the worship of Stalin in official and propaganda pronouncements.

On the international front there have been these steps by the Communist front:

- (1) Acceptance of UN proposal for the exchange of sick and wounded in Korea.
- (2) Limited acceptance of the principle of voluntary repatriation of POWs (delivered four days after Chou En-lai's return from Moscow).
- (3) Proposal for discussion of disarmament and atomic controls.
- (4) Initiation of four-power discussions regarding air safety in the Berlin air corridor.

- (5) Release of French and British internees in Korea.
- (6) Toning down of anti-Western propaganda attacks in favor of stressing the possibility of co-existence.
- (7) Agreement on a UN Secretary General.
- (8) Relaxation of Berlin traffic controls.
- (9) Soviet initiative or social fraternization at almost all points throughout the world where there is contact between Communist officials and the West.

A Soviet peace offensive has always been considered a possibility, but this one came sooner than anticipated and it has been pushed with unexpected vigor. It constitutes a clear departure from the recent tactics of the Stalin regime.

WHAT ARE THE PROBABLE OBJECTIVES TO THE SOVIET OF
SUCH A PEACE OFFENSIVE?

- (1) To lessen the danger to the Soviet of general war now.
- (2) To gain a breathing spell for the new regime.
- (3) To stop American rearmament.
- (4) To defeat EDC.
- (5) To prepare the way for new proposals on the neutralization
and unification of Germany and Japan, to prevent their rearmament
and force the withdrawal of American troops from Europe and Asia.
- (6) To strengthen the Communist parties in France and Italy
for the coming elections.

All our estimates have been unanimous in the view that the Soviet
Union has no desire to provoke or become involved in a general war

at this time. It is not ready with sufficient atomic weapons or adequate means for delivering such weapons. Also it recognizes its present industrial inferiority to the West.

The one area where the Soviets may fear that events could lead them into war is in the Korean theatre. They have already seen a stiffening of our own Far Eastern policy and recognize the possibility that the Korean war, if continued, might be enlarged to the Chinese theatre. Then the Soviets might have to face the alternative of deserting their Chinese ally or intervening directly, which might lead to war. An armistice in Korea would postpone this danger.

Presumably the Soviet leaders view American and NATO rearmament, American air bases, and a vigorous American foreign policy as a growing threat. They propose to try to reduce this threat

by ending the Korean war and by creating problems for us in Europe.

At the same time the new Moscow regime would get a breathing spell.

Hence a peace offensive is easily explainable within the framework of the flexible tactics which are so familiar in Soviet policy.

Soviet moves in the internal field are far more difficult to rationalize.

Stalin's program for firmly installing Malenkov as his successor and for carrying on the Stalinist policy seems to have backfired and it may be premature to assume that the succession problem is finally solved. Here is evidence on this point:

(1) The governmental machinery established by Stalin at the Party Congress in October has been scrapped.

(2) Malenkov has resigned as Party Secretary - and thus given up a position of real power.

(3) Neither the dead Stalin nor Malenkov is advertised in Soviet broadcasts - the stress is on the Party.

(4) Malenkov has issued no statement, nor has he appeared in public, since March 15, the day after he was retired as Party Secretary.

(5) Finally, the doctors' plot concocted under Stalin and Malenkov has been repudiated, with the remarkable admission that there was no legal basis whatever for the charges, and that confessions were obtained by unpermissible methods of investigation forbidden by Soviet law -- language strong enough to raise doubts, even in the Soviet Union and satellites, regarding all the purge trials of the past decades. Our Embassy in Moscow comments: "Doubts may arise as to the stability of a government in which such fantastic reversals take place."

On the basis of these facts some experts believe that the old Bolsheviks, Molotov, Bulganin and Krushchev, possibly in alliance

with the Army, may be moving into a position to take over the real leadership. It took ten years after Lenin's death for Stalin to become firmly entrenched in power. It would be remarkable if Malenkov could accomplish it overnight.

When Lenin died, Stalin and Trotsky vied with each other to avoid the honor of making the first great public policy declaration. The man who did it was later liquidated.

Of course there are more sensational rumors - for instance that Stalin, who displayed signs of instability in his speech at the October Party Congress, was liquidated by the second set of doctors, installed by Malenkov.

This is pure speculation.

From the point of view of the policy makers, the following is about all that existing intelligence justifies:

(1) It is too early to assume that the succession problem has been finally solved.

(2) An abrupt change in Soviet tactics, comparable only to that in 1939, may be impending.

(3) There are deep and unresolved inner tensions which may affect Soviet foreign policy.

(4) Soviet leaders may well desire a breathing spell on the international front in order to consolidate their positions at home and their control over the satellites.

(5) Finally, while there is no ground for assuming any change in basic Soviet policy toward the West, they have demonstrated the capacity for great flexibility of tactics. Stalin's death faced them with a new emergency. They are adopting new techniques to meet it.